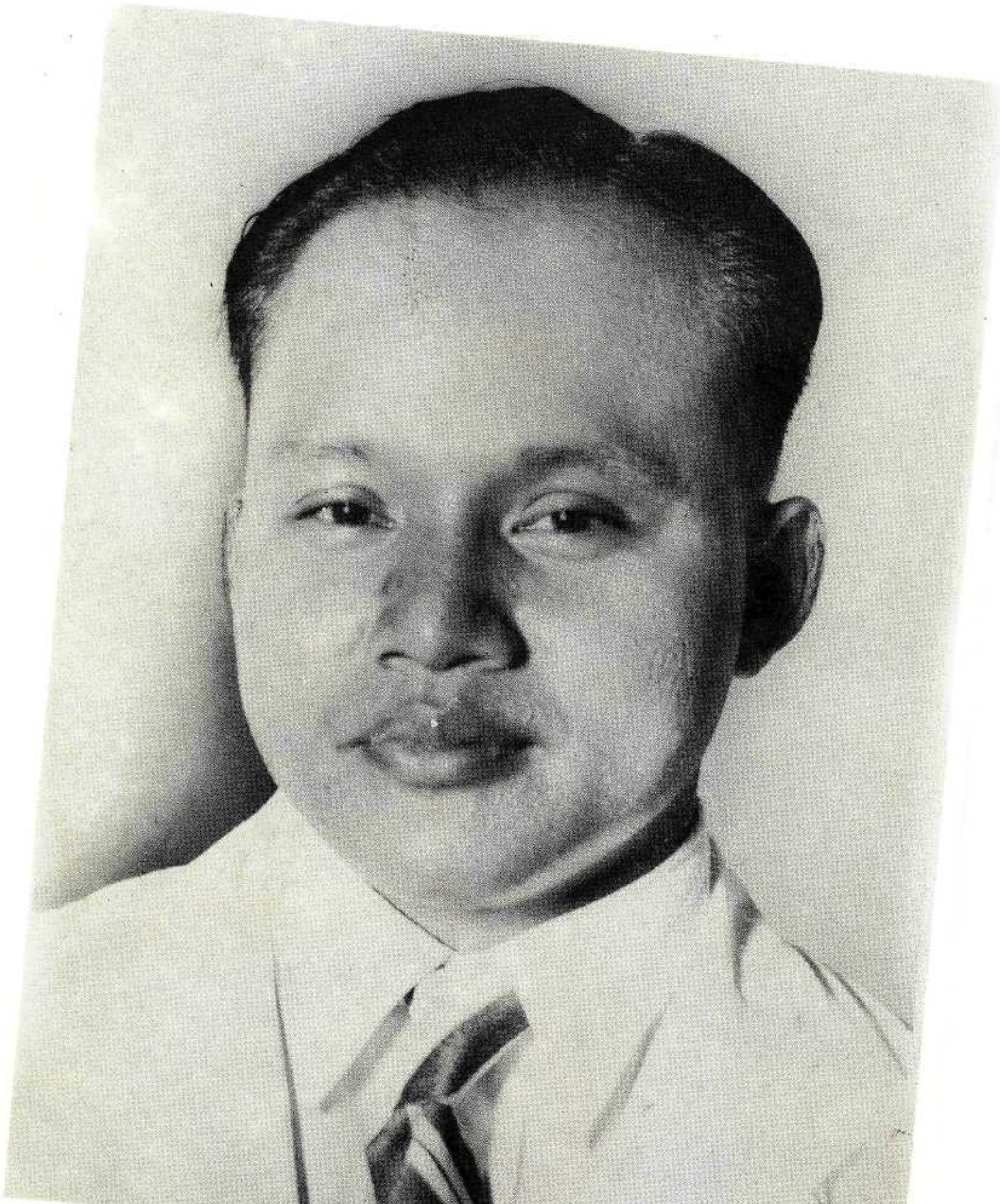
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Prof. Ir. KUSNOTO SETYODIWIRYO

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IN MEMORIAM
PROF. IR. KUSNOTO SETYODIWIRYO

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After a long illness, Prof. Ir. Kusnoto Setyodiwiryo died peacefully in his home in Bogor on 29 April 1981. He was the first Indonesian to become the Director of the Botanical Gardens of Indonesia, the forerunner of the National Biological Institute. It was mostly due to his far-sighted action that at the moment many biological, agricultural, fishery and oceanological laboratories in Indonesia are manned by qualified and full-fledged scientists.

Kusnoto Setyodiwiryo was born on 11 February 1911 in Banyurip, a village near Purworejo (Central Java). At first he attended the local village school in which Javanese was used as a medium of instruction. Fortunately a helpful uncle, Mr. M. Sardjono, took him up and sent him to a Dutch elementally school (HIS) first in Singaraja (Bali) and later in Pasuruan (East Java). This had opened the way for him for further education, especially because his school marks were always good. After completing the Dutch junior high school (MULO) in Surabaya in 1928, he entered the General High School (AMS) in Yogyakarta, obtaining a B /Science certificate in 1981. For a period he was enrolled in NIAS or Nederlands-Indies School for Physicians in Surabaya, but in the same year he won a government scholarship which enabled him to study at the Faculty of Agriculture in Wageningen University (Holland).

After graduating as Agricultural Engineer from that University in 1936, he was employed as a plant breeder at the General Agricultural Research Station in Bogor. He was mainly concerned with the development of cotton, jute, roselle, castor-oil plant and maize cultivars for the semi arid areas in the Lesser Sunda Islands. This interest took him to many areas in Timor and Flores and the Dutch colonial government even sent him to India for comparative study purposes. His few scientific publications were written about this period and dealt with selections and cultivations of those crops he was working with.

During the World War II he was appointed as the Deputy Director of the General Agricultural Research Station, a post he held until 1945. When the Japanese Director left the country together with the Japanese colonial government, the Ministry of Welfare of the newly proclaimed Republic of Indonesia naturally appointed him as the Director of the Institute. When the Republican government had to migrate to Yogyakarta from Jakarta, being a die-hard nationalist he kept to his post as a republican employee, eventhough he lost contact with the central government during the most part of the war of independence period.

When the sovereignty of the state was transferred again to the Indonesian government, early in 1950 he was appointed as the Director of the Research Institute for Natural Sciences (Botanic Gardens of Indonesia). Being one of a few qualified scientists available to the government his service was solicited from far and wide, often outside his official jurisdiction. He was charged with the leading of Indonesian delegations after delegations to FAO and UNESCO Council Meetings and chairing several government committees (among others the State Committee on Textile Industry, Committee on Sea Fishery Development, Board of Curators of College of Biology). He also served as committee member in the Indonesian Council for Sciences, the International Rice Committee, the Pacific Science Association, the Bogor War Museum Foundation and so on. These activities were resented by many people who believed that he was very ambitious of getting further personal promotion that he officially requested the government to relieve him from these involvements. The heads of department in the Research Institute for Natural Sciences often also missed his presence that they wrote the government to "return" him to them because his guidance was very much needed in the growing research activities in Botanical Gardens of Indonesia. As was always happened with such requests, the government turned a deaf ear.

From the very beginning he realized that the future of the Institute depended upon the manpower development. He already envisioned that the Institute could not relied upon forever on foreign scientists hired under the fragile political agreement between the governments of the Republic of Indonesia and the Nederlands. Therefore he developed means to overcome the situation by immediately implemented a plan to set up the College of Biology in 1955. He broke away from the then prevailing system of higher education by asking the students to sit the examination at an appointed time and not at the time chosen by the students when they thought that they were ready. In order to attract

the best brains to this newly created college, he offered a special scholarship on top of free board, lodging and tuition fee. Out of the 2700 applicants for the first batch, 30 were selected and 27 graduated with Bachelor degree in early 1959, a record time for that period. The same success story was repeated in subsequent batches year after year, and many of them who were given opportunity to study further managed to obtain their Ph.D. degrees from the best universities in the United Kingdom, USA, Netherlands and other countries in the world, and now hold the key positios in Indonesia in the field of biology, fishery, oceanography and agriculture.

Characteriscally Kusnoto Setyodiwiryo himself took an active part in educating these students (which he considered as his own sons and daughters so that he invited them to his birthday parties) by lecturing on the introduction to general biology and on genetics. This was not altogether surprising because in 1951 he was appointed as an extra-ordinary professor of biology at the University of Gajah Mada. That he was sincerely interested in educating the younger generations was evident from the fact that he was also one of the founder of the private National University in Jakarta in 1949, no doubt spurred by his deep nationalistic feeling, as this university was also an answer to the action by the Dutch colonial government who established the University of Indonesia, In fact during the war of independence, while serving as a republic employee, he taught in a "Republic High School" in Bogor and because of his non-conformity with the colonial government he was imprisoned in Jakarta for 6 months.

The impressions planted in the minds of those who knew him were the same: he was an extremely active man, open to suggestion and liked to make an immediate firm decision. The appointment of Mr. Anwari Dilmy as the Head of the Herbarium Bogoriense to replace the ex-patriate head who was considered making actions detrimental to the Institute was clinched in one day. It was due to his initiative and his forcefulness that in that politically difficult period the plans to establish additional botanical gardens near Padang in West Sumatra (the Setia Mulia Botanic Garden in 1956) and in Bali (the Eka Karya Botanic Garden in 1959) were executed.

When the fruits of all his activities were beginning to be felt, to his disappoinment at the end of 1959 he was asked to leave Bogor and became permanently attached to the Minister of Agriculture as a scientific adviser, a post he held until the time of his retirement. Soon afterwards he suffered from a serious illness which compelled him to move about on

a wheel chair. Being an active person, his deanship in the Faculty of Biology at the National University was performed efficiently from his home. This illness did not deter him to supervise innumerable research students of that University, who regularly flocked to his home for consultations. In fact he was still the dean of that Faculty at the time of his death.

He will be missed by his former colleagues and students but mostly by his family. He was survived by his wife, his two sons and two daughters who between them gave him twelve grandchildren. Our deepest sympathy goes to them.

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